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Title	From self-colonisation to conquest in Eastern European postcommunist musicals
Type	Article
URL	https://clock.uclan.ac.uk/id/eprint/40645/
DOI	https://doi.org/10.1080/17411548.2022.2031806
Date	2022
Citation	Mazierska, Ewa Hanna (2022) From self-colonisation to conquest in Eastern European postcommunist musicals. Studies in European Cinema. ISSN 1741-1548
Creators	Mazierska, Ewa Hanna

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17411548.2022.2031806>

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From Self-colonisation to Conquest in Eastern European Postcommunist Musicals

In this article I examine four musicals from three countries which are currently described as East-Central Europe, and which before the fall of the Iron Curtain belonged to the Soviet bloc. All of them were made during the period of postcommunism, but present life under state socialism, Czech *Šakali leta* (*Big Beat*, 1993), directed by Jan Hřebejk, Hungarian *Made in Hungaria* (2009), directed by Gergely Fonyó, and two Polish films, *Córki dancingu* (*The Lure*, 2015), directed by Agnieszka Smoczyńska and *Zimna wojna* (*Cold War*, 2018), directed by Paweł Pawlikowski, from the perspective of their attitude to both western and their own culture and popular music. My argument is that each film assesses differently this culture and music. This difference can be seen as a reflection of the period when these films were made and which they depict, the aspect of western culture they focus on, the position of indigenous popular music in the communist period and, finally, the specificity of their production and their target audience. The crucial concept in my enquiry is that of colonialism and self-colonisation. Before I move to the films, I will present briefly the position of popular cinema and music in Eastern Europe in the period of state socialism and discuss the concepts of colonialism and postcolonialism.

Popular cinema and music in Eastern Europe

Richard Dyer and Ginette Vincendeau notice in the introduction to their book about popular European cinema that

the term 'popular' is notoriously slippery or, alternatively, rich... The productive messiness of the term may be explored through the supposed opposition between two paradigms, one based on the market, the other drawn from anthropology. The popular can refer to things that are commercially successful and/or to things that are produced by, or express the thoughts, values of, 'the people'. (Dyer and Vincendeau 1992: 2)

In the context of Eastern Europe, the second paradigm or approach is more important, due to the socialist state's ambition to liberate culture from commercial pressures. However, the commercial element did not disappear from consideration. Throughout the period of state socialism in Eastern Europe, we can identify three principal approaches to popular culture, including cinema and popular music, mimicking three main periods in this region's history: 1) that of socialist realism, which started in the late 1940s and finished around mid-1950s, 2)

of building national arthouse cinemas and music, from the mid-1950s till the mid-1970s, and 3) of early neoliberalisation, which covered the remainder of the period, till the fall of the system at the end of the 1980s (Mazierska 2020). Each period can be further divided into smaller units and there were also differences between countries in regard to the cultural policies of specific periods. For example, the 1970s was a time of cultural liberalisation in Poland and Hungary, while Czechoslovakia suffered from re-Stalinisation and increased censorship. Nevertheless, each period represents a different approach to popular cinema and music.

In the first period there was no conceptual difference between popular and elitist cinema and music. Each film and composition, produced during this period, was meant to express the values of 'the people' or rather participate in a creation of 'new men and women', engaged in building of the new communist reality. In cinema, it led to the upsurge of comedies, which typically showed how conservative people can be moved to the side of the ideals of socialism, if they see the advantages of the socialist economy, as in the Hungarian *Mágnás Miska* (*Mickey Magnate*, 1949), directed by Márton Keleti and Polish *Przygoda na Mariensztacie* (*An Adventure at Marienstadt*, 1954), directed by Leonard Buczkowski. The privileged form of music was a 'mass song', which was meant to tell stories about events important for the masses and be performed by them. In Poland, all leading serious composers of the era, including Andrzej Panufnik, Witold Lutosławski and Wojciech Kilar, engaged in composing them (Rzanna-Szczepaniak 2013: 141).

The second period brought a separation between popular and arthouse cinema and popular and arthouse music, in recognition that they play different social functions. In cinema, the former was expected to inculcate higher values in the audience and represent a national cinema abroad, projecting an image of socialist countries as liberal and progressive; the latter was meant to entertain domestic audiences and convey optimism. One, probably unexpected consequence of such demarcation was a difference in prestige between filmmakers engaged in different types of cinema; with the arthouse directors enjoying a much higher position than those making popular films. Among them were many creators of respective New Waves, such as Andrzej Wajda in Poland, Miklós Jancsó in Poland and Miloš Forman in Czechoslovakia. They were left mostly to their own devices and were even allowed to express some criticism of the state, as proof to the world that state socialist authorities were open to new ideas and tolerated dissent. A similar phenomenon happened in

music; the creators of serious music, previously wooed or coerced to compose mass songs, were now free to pursue musical experimentation. Their liberation was symbolised by the Warsaw Autumn Festival, found in 1956 by two composers, Tadeusz Baird and Kazimierz Serocki, which for many years was the only festival of contemporary music in Eastern Europe. The consequences of the relative political freedom such artists enjoyed was respect granted to them by general public and recognition abroad, not unlike that enjoyed by the film *auteurs*. By contrast, creators of popular cinema and music neither enjoyed the same level of the state's support nor the same prestige. Paradoxically, although their success did not depend on the state's subsidy and they even subsidised more elitist cinema and music, their work was disparaged as a conformist and regime-friendly art.

In the third period, coinciding with deep economic crisis, beginning in the second half of the 1970s, there was a greater emphasis on art making money, which resulted in some improvement of the position of producers of popular cinema and music. In Poland, it resulted in allowing capital owned by the Polish diaspora (Polonia) to set up private recording companies. These non-state firms operated with permission from the Ministry of Culture and Art, but had more latitude in production and pricing (Patton 2012: 441).

There were also differences in the position of specific film and music genres in different countries. When musical is considered we can risk the statement that in Czechoslovakia it had a highest reputation of the three countries considered here. This resulted from such factors as the state's investment in creating popular songs and a better integration, in comparison with Poland and Hungary, of film and popular music, as reflected in the music stars frequently playing in films. Moreover, the critical acclaim of certain Czechoslovak musicals from the 1960s, such as *Starci na chmelu* (*The Hop Pickers*, 1964), directed by Ladislav Rychman and *Limonadový Joe* (*Lemonade Joe*, 1964), directed by Oldřich Lipský, placed the whole genre of musicals in a positive halo (Owen 2019). At the other side of the spectrum was Poland, where vernacular musicals were met with derision and even the very idea of making a Polish musical was seen as problematic. This was reflected in the term 'muzykol' (Fortuna 2015), which suggested that Poland was unable to produce any musicals worthy of the name.

Irrespective of the critical attitude to musicals, everywhere in Eastern Europe of state socialism they were very popular, often breaking box office records of a given year. Eastern European musicals produced in the last thirty years or so, of which a large proportion is set in

the ‘communist’ past, can be regarded as a tribute to their often disparaged ancestors, as well as a way to capitalise on the constant popularity of musicals in Eastern Europe.

Colonialism and self-colonisation

Colonialism is a form of domination, which has political, economic, social and cultural dimensions. It is not a monolithic phenomenon and takes different forms. In particular, there are important differences between pre-modern and modern colonialism, as well as between planned and spontaneous colonialization. The coloniser normally regards their language and culture as higher than those of the colonised, and have seen their dissemination as progressive (Kangilaski, quoted in Mazierska, Kristensen and Närepea 2014: 3). Anne McClintock differentiates between 1) colonization that ‘involves direct territorial appropriation of another geo-political entity, combined with forthright exploitation of its resources and labor, and systematic interference in the capacity of the appropriated culture (itself not necessarily a homogeneous entity) to organize its dispensations of power’; 2) internal colonization that ‘occurs where the dominant part of a country treats a group or region as it might a foreign colony’ and 3) ‘imperial colonization, [which,] by extension, involves large-scale, territorial domination of the kind that gave late Victorian Britain and the European “lords of humankind” control over 85% of the earth, and the USSR totalitarian rule over Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia in the twentieth century’ (McClintock 1992: 5).

Although the Soviets were military colonisers, many of the countries they subjugated, including three discussed in this article, did not see themselves as culturally inferior. This has made a number of scholars regard Russo-Soviet colonization as ‘reverse-cultural colonization’: ‘Mittel-European capitals such as Budapest, Berlin, and Prague were seen in Russia, at least by some, as prizes rather than as burdens needing civilizing from their occupiers. In return, the Central Europeans often saw the colonizing Russo-Soviets as “Asiatics”, as “Orientals” unable to assume a position of a colonizer, especially in relation to apparently less Oriental people’ (Knight 2002: 300; Mazierska, Kristensen and Närepea 2014: 10). This, however, did not help to carry the burden of being a colonial subject; probably the opposite was the case. ==

Cultural colonization might be resisted by a voluntary self-colonization with a different culture. A frequently quoted example is the resistance of Soviet influence to the

adoption of elements of Western culture by the inhabitants of the satellite countries or even Russians, by listening to British and American music or watching American films

If we look specifically at popular music, then we encounter a view that it is dominated by music produced in a small number of countries using its economic and technological advantages. This view is known as ‘cultural’ or ‘media imperialism’ (Negus). Keith Negus lists various variations of this domination, such as: a) the shape of communication vehicle, b) a set of industrial relationships; a body of values and d) media content (Negus 1996: 169-70). I have no space to consider these aspects of media imperialism in detail, but only want to point that with such comprehensive list of advantages, it was very difficult to resist the power of Anglo-American music.

Scholars examining East European popular music claim that it was also an object of cultural domination of western and predominantly Anglo-American music (Ryback 1990; Ramet 1994; Risch 2015). On this occasion, however, we cannot talk about straightforward colonisation, because the socialist governments resisted the Western attempts to flood the markets with their music by simply not importing it or only in small quantities, as well as putting a negative spin on popular culture coming from the West. The very fact that these countries have no convertible currency rendered such import difficult. Nevertheless, the scarcity and the aura of a forbidden fruit rendered western popular culture and especially music very attractive to Eastern European consumers. In their case we can talk about self-colonisation, because it was self-inflicted, rather than imposed from outside.

Timothy Ryback, for example, mentions Beatlemania in Poland, East Germany and Czech Republic, arguing that

Western rock culture has debunked Marxist-Leninist assumptions about the state’s ability to control its citizens. Across more than eight thousand miles of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, from the cusp of the Berlin Wall to the dockyards of Vladivostok, three generations of young socialists, who should have been bonded by the liturgy of Marx and Lenin, have instead found common ground in the music of the Rolling Stones and the Beatles. (Ryback 1990: 5)

In the subsequent sections of this article I will assess whether colonisation and self-colonisation can be detected in the discussed films and what forms they take.

Big Beat: Not quite big beat

Šakali leta (*Big Beat*, 1993) belongs to the earliest postcommunist musicals. It is also a debut film of Jan Hřebejk (b. 1967), who in due course would become the most commercially successful director in Czechoslovakia, as well as one of the most critically acclaimed, having received an Oscar nomination for *Musíme si pomáhat* (*Divided We Fall*, 2000). The script for *Big Beat* was written by Petr Jarchovský, who would become Hřebejk's regular collaborator. On this occasion the basis of the script are short stories, written in the late 1980s by Petr Šabach, a writer compared to the better-known writer Michal Viewegh, whose books were adapted for several successful films, due to their focus on growing up, humour and nostalgia. Given the place in Hřebejk's career, this film was addressed to the national audiences.

Šabach's stories and the film are set at the end of the 1950s in Prague's Dejvice district, an affluent area, in which Václav Havel used to live. Its hallmark is the Hotel International Prague, completed in 1950, in a style associated with communist architecture in Moscow, and which was also adopted in some Eastern European capitals, such as Warsaw and Riga. The Hotel International is also the most important setting of Hřebejk's film, as most of the action takes place there or in its proximity. Two of its main characters, the waiter Eda and singer Milada work in this building. The film shows their romantic trials and tribulations, in which other characters are also involved. One is Bejbina, a pretty girl, living nearby with her little brother, her father policeman, named Prokop and an old and senile aunt. Another is Bejby ('Baby'), a distant relative who comes to look after the aunt. Eda and Bejby are both romantically interested in Milada and Bejbina, although in relation to Bejby, this is implied rather than shown explicitly. The romantic situation is further complicated by Milada being married to some Party official who is away. In the end the connections are revealed and Milada's husband takes revenge on Bejby, sending him to prison and on Milada, by beating her.

Two of the main characters, Bejby and Milada, are both musicians, although many more characters in the film sing, including Eda, Bejbina and members of gangs of youngsters, operating near the Hotel International. The singing and dancing gangs bring to mind *West Side Story* (1961), the American musical, directed by Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins, which was set about the same time as *Big Beat*. The film begins when Milada is singing the song 'Ananas – Caracas' and playing marakas, with the accompaniment of a jazz band, for the enjoyment of the guests in the hotel restaurant. 'Ananas – Caracas' is the only song,

which was not written especially for *Big Beat*. It was written in the 1950s by songwriter Ewrin Halletz from Vienna and lyricist Hans Bradtke from Berlin. They wrote it originally for Swiss actor Vico Torriani in 1957 under the German title ‘Ananas aus Caracas’ for a German film *Siebenmal in der Woche* (*Seven Times in a Week*, 1957), directed by Harald Philipp, in which Torriani played the main role, of a singing star who enters a sham marriage, to manage his stardom better. The song was written in the style of mambo, a hybrid Latino dance style, which became a precursor of salsa. It was released on Czech label Supraphon in 1958 with Czech lyrics by Ladislav Sádovský and performed by Karel Duda and Eva Martinová with Mirko Foret’s band. Including it in *Big Beat* can be seen as a complex intertextual tribute: to South American music, popular in Germany and Eastern Europe in the 1950s, to German musicals of this era and to old Czechoslovak estrada music of the late 1950s and the 1960s.

Subsequently we hear several types of song. One type is associated with Bejby. He sings rock and roll songs, but in Czech, and they are closer to the soft rather than hard pole of this genre. We also hear ‘ballads’ in a style oscillating between soft rock and estrada songs popular in Czechoslovakia during the 1960s and 1970s, as represented by Václav Neckář and of films made in this period (Hučko 2016: 267). In fact, Jakub Špalek, who plays Eda, reminds us a bit of the hapless and absent-minded characters played by Neckář. These songs were written for the film specially by Ivan Hlas (b. 1954), a popular composer, player and singer, rather than simply recovered and recycled from the past, as if suggesting that the film tries to *recreate* the past culture rather than simply resurrect it – a point to which I will move shortly.

Bejby’s arriving on the stage is clouded in mystery. We see him for the first at a railway station where he is picked up by Prokop and taken to his apartment. We do not know where he comes from or even whether he arrived by train. Moreover, his senile aunt does not recognise him, suggesting that he usurped a place in Prokop’s apartment, as opposed to being her true relative. Rather than having specific geographical roots, he comes across as a foreigner, dissociated from Czechoslovak landscape and culture. This is accentuated by his appearance. He wears a red shirt, red platform shoes, colourful tie and, on occasions, dark glasses, a chequered jacket. He also sports a guitar. Such a look is meant to evoke an image of western rebellious youths from this period – it is closest to British ‘mods’ and their imitations in Eastern Europe. Bejby attracts a huge following, due to his western look and the

music he plays: on his record and his own guitar. It is mostly children in a local gang who listen to him and try to imitate him, but Milana also falls under his spell when one day he invades the stage at a restaurant where she works and forces the band to play rock and roll, rather than a typical Schlager music.

However, Bejby comes across not as an original, but as an exaggerated version of a mod – his platform shoes are too high, his tie too wide and his manners too conspicuous, as if he was posing for photographs. Why is he like that? Veronika Pehe suggests that this results from Hřebejk applying the idea of retro (Pehe 2020: 54-5), which allows to playfully aesthetise the past, without engaging in past politics, neither condemning it as totalitarian, nor arguing for its revival. Retro, writes Pehe,

produces a pastiche of styles... which connotes pastness, while at the same time retaining a fashionable present-day appeal. In visual texts, this is often most apparent in costume design: in the case of *Šakali leta*, while the shapes and cuts of the 1950s are quoted and reproduced, materials will often employ a wider and fuller colour palette than would have been available at the time to create a more contemporary look. *Šakali leta* is a strong example of this kind of retro aesthetic; its genre lends itself particularly well to hyperbole and visual spectacle. (Pehe 2016: 99)

Without dismissing such an interpretation, I argue that it can also be approached from the perspective of self-colonisation, as previously discussed, namely imitation of the cultural coloniser. It is worth mentioning that while the authors writing about Eastern Europeans infecting themselves with western music and popular culture, see it unproblematically as a ‘good thing’, because they regard it as a barometer of Eastern European political resistance towards their eastern political and economic coloniser, authors, addressing postcoloniality from the perspective of nations conquered by the West, approach self-colonisation more critically. For them, it is simultaneously a sign of embracing a stronger and more alluring culture and resisting it. In particular, Hamid Naficy considers minorities applying

certain defensive, resistive, and pleasurable performance strategies as creative means of fashioning new and empowered identities that counter their sociopolitical subalternity and cultural marginalization. Of these, mimicry, passing, posing, camp, drag, sly civility, doubling, and masquerade depend on the existence of an original something that is turned into something else, a copy of the original. Put another way,

they depend on repeating an original as the same with a difference – a difference that often implies criticism of that which is being imitated. (Naficy 2001: 269–71)

My argument is that the strategies described by Naficy also refer to Bejby and Hřebejk. They imitate western music and culture, but at the same time indicate their distance from what they imitate, in awareness that full imitation cannot be achieved and would be dangerous, as it would erase the indigenous Czech culture. Ultimately, this culture is what Hřebejk cares most about. He points to the fact that at the time he depicts in his film, it is fragile, being squeezed between two powerful forces. One of them is coming from the West, as represented by the music played by Bejby; the other from the East, as epitomised by the International Hotel, whose appearance is monumentalised by the use of low-angle cinematography, as well as the conquest of space by the Soviet Union, which the hotel guests admire from its roof, looking at Sputnik through a telescope. Significantly, the Soviet culture is not maligned in the film. The Hotel International, similarly as Russian achievements in space exploration, has largely positive connotations, adding grandeur to a rather unremarkable neighbourhood. Watching the film one might wonder whether this culture would survive, being subjected to such immense pressure, but with the benefit of hindsight we know that not only did it survive, but actually flourished in the 1960s, thanks to both its filmic and music productions. This happened because these influences, as well as those coming from Germany and Austria, were adopted by Czechs critically. They reworked them, creating their own idiom.

Given that the film draws on many different musical and visual styles, without fully embracing any of them, it is surprising that the English title of the film is *Big Beat*, rather than *Jackals of Summer*, which is not only a literal translation of the title, but also one which better reflects the action of the film. *Big Beat*, of course, suggests that the film is about big beat, which is the name for rock, adopted in many Eastern European countries, rather than different genres of music, enjoyed by Czechs at the time, and simply life in Prague at the end of the 1950s. It seems as if the distributors assumed that the foreign audience would be more interested in Czechs ‘injecting’ themselves with western culture than producing their own. Hence, the title, more than the film, is a product of self-colonisation.

As for being Hřebejk’s debut film, *Big Beat* did very well, on the domestic market. It won four Czech Lion awards (Czech Oscars), including Best Film of 1993, Best Director (Hřebejk), Best Actor (Josef Abrhám) and Best Original Score. However, unlike Hřebejk’s

subsequent films, *Big Beat* remained practically unknown beyond the borders of Czechoslovakia.

Made in Hungaria: Self-colonisation as liberation

In the 1980s the director of *Made in Hungaria*, Gergely Fonyó (b. 1966), worked as a cameraman in Budapest, then in the 1990s in Los Angeles. His low budget first feature film was shot in the USA, but postproduction was made in Budapest. *Kelj fel Jancsi (Johnny Famous, 2000)* won the divided main prize at the 2001 Hungarian Film Festival. Afterwards Fonyó directed music documentaries, TV shows and finally *Made in Hungaria* (Varga 2019: 67), his most acclaimed film.

Made in Hungaria is set in the 1960s and is based on the real story of Miklos ‘Miki’ Fenyo, a teenager who after four years spent with his family in the United States, returns to Budapest and there establishes himself as a rock star. There is thus a certain fit between the life stories of Fonyó and Fenyo, as well as a similarity in their names. The film opens in the spring of 1963, when the Fenyos arrive at an airport in Hungary and are interrogated by the border police. This scene introduces us to the operations of an authoritarian regime where everybody is suspected of betraying their country. However, the family manages to be allowed back without much trouble and find themselves in their old apartment, albeit they have to share their kitchen and bathroom with another lodger. This might be explained by the relative liberalisation of this period in Hungary, which finished in 1968, following the suppression of the Prague Spring (Hammer 2017: 62-3).

While the parents quietly accept the fact that they made a mistake and need to be humble to be able to rebuild their lives in their old homeland, Miki rebels against what he perceives as his social demotion, by continuing with his American ways. He wears a colourful Hawaii shirt or a T-shirt with a ‘USA’ logo, sports a rocker’s hairstyle and presents himself as a connoisseur of American popular music, even more so than Bejby in Hřebejk’s film. Luckily for him, his return to Hungary coincides with the Hungarian authorities recognising the need to provide the youths with an outlet for their energy, so that they would not cause mischief. One way is organising amateur musical competitions, where the young people could show off their talent. However, the Hungarian authorities (as was the case in Eastern European planned economy regimes) do not leave the participants much freedom about what and how to sing. The plan is for the youngsters to compete with each other for the

best performance of ‘socialist’ songs. These songs, however, are rejected by potential competitors on the grounds of being old-fashioned and boring. They prefer songs covering or imitating American rock and roll. In this context Miki is seen as an asset as he knows American culture first-hand. Hence, the conflict in the film is between an inept and obedient low-level apparatchik Bigali, who attempts to tame Miki, so that he follows the official political agenda and Miki and his young friends, who want to play Americanised music. In the end the youngsters win, because their need to have fun is impossible to quash and it is only American hits which give expression to their youthful urges.

In such a representation of 1960s Eastern Europe, Fonyó follows the schemes dominating the histories of European popular music which render this period as that of ‘imitation’ (of western music) and links Eastern European youth’s infatuation with rock and roll with political rebellion (Ramet 1994). Such conceptualisation is not false, but it is simplistic, as previously mentioned. During the time *Made in Hungaria* is set, there were already successful attempts to create, in Eastern Europe, its own versions of rock, addressing local problems and issues and hybridising the rock idiom with other influences. Hungary was at the forefront of this phenomenon, with the band Omega being founded in 1962 and Neoton Familia in 1965; both bands which gained significant fame in Eastern Europe and beyond (Hammer 2017: 63-4). However, we do not find in this film any songs demonstrating the novelty of Hungarian rock and pop, indeed any rock ‘made in Hungaria’. Instead, we find three types of songs. The first type consists of American rock and roll hits, those of Jerry Lee Lewis and Elvis Presley. Such songs are brought by Miki from the United States in the form of vinyl records, which are his most prized possessions. Subsequently they become an object of envy of his peers and a sign of his elevated social status. Meaningfully, we do not hear them in the film; they are talked about rather than being played. Their absence might have resulted from copyright problems, but even if this is the case, the result affords them a mythological status. This is also confirmed in the discussions Miki has with fellow fans of American music. He is repeatedly asked about his contact with the ‘originals’ – whether he has records released by American companies, as opposed to those released by Supraphon and whether he attended concerts of American rock and roll stars. He reassures them that he had and saw the originals and even carries a lighter with Elvis Presley’s photo, as if to augment his status as the owner of the ‘originals’.

The second type of songs are Hungarian versions of American hits or songs written in a similar style. Although they are performed in Hungarian, apart from language they do not add anything to these originals. Yet, the audience loves them, as demonstrated by the fact that they elicit an immediate bodily reaction: moving legs of those who are sitting, dancing in those who are standing, taking off clothes by those who are dancing. The idea of liberation through music is presented in *Made in Hungaria* not through becoming political, but becoming spontaneous and happy. Yet, spontaneity can also be seen as a political position, especially in a system which fears and condemns spontaneity, but in the context of Eastern Europe the political value of rock was seen mostly as encouraging anti-government views. Finally, we get songs which are ‘politically correct’. They are discussed in the course of the narrative and finally performed during the competition. There is talk about a Cuban song depicting the suffering of people exploited on the plantation and what we hear eventually is a Schlager-type song performed by a group of East German female singers to the accompaniment of Hungarian musicians. Songs of this type do not excite the listeners, but make them yawn. It is, however, telling that to show the contrast between the good, liberating westernised music and the bad ‘socialist’ music Fonyó had to bring into his film a group of young East German women. This is because East Germany had a reputation of being the most authoritarian and its citizens the most brain-washed of all inhabitants of the eastern bloc. It is also in East Germany where socialist realism in music survived much longer than in other countries of the Eastern bloc (Tompkins 2013: 15-93). If Fonyó used Hungarian performers in this context, most likely the difference between bad (socialist) and good (western and westernised) music would be less pronounced. To demonstrate the superiority of rock and roll over what is sung and played in Germany, the film shows the otherwise stern and repressed East German women (as attested by their formal uniforms), who lose their posture, start singing and even take off their clothes. This scene can be compared to that in *Big Beat* when Bejby enters the scene where Milada performs and she, metaphorically and literally, changes her tune to start singing Bejby’s song. Such scenes point to the superiority of American music over the domestic product and masculine music over music performed by women. In *Made in Hungaria* the superiority of rock and masculine music is, however, strengthened in comparison with the Czech film, as here women are reduced to a passive audience of male feats of energy with their phallic instruments. Women react to the sounds of rock and roll as if they were mechanical dolls put into motion by turning the key in their bodies or pressing a remote control.

Fonyó's film not only emphasises American superiority through its use of music, but also its narrative and visual style. It uses the common Hollywood trope of a young and talented hero who finds himself in a hostile environment and has to prove himself in the eyes of his peers and a young woman whom he fancies. The exquisite dresses worn by the characters, which accentuate their movements when they 'twist and shake' and render them as an ensemble dancing together, also bring to mind Hollywood musicals. They also suggest that, as in *Big Beat*, *Made in Hungaria* is a *retro* film, rather than a historical film, because its point is to beautify the past, rather than represent it in line with historical truth. There is also a tendency to shoot from different angles in the dancing scenes to add dynamism to such movements. Although we are to believe that the lives of Miki, his friends, parents and practically everybody who was not a Party official, was drab, in the crucial scenes the young characters drive through Budapest in a convertible, as is singularly the case with American youth, when shown in musicals and music videos.

When discussing Hřebejk's film, I drew attention to its English title which misrepresented the content of the film, by emphasising the importance of rock and roll music in the film, which adopted a more balanced approach to music. *Made in Hungaria* is also misleading by suggesting that music in the film is a vernacular product, while in reality what we see is 'not made in Hungaria', but at best an imitation of western idiom, which points – more than in the case of the Czech film – to the inferiority of Hungarian popular music towards its cultural coloniser.

As Balázs Varga observes, *Made in Hungaria* was the most successful Hungarian film in the year of its premiere, with almost 250,000 admissions (Varga 2018: 67). This success can be attributed to several factors. One of them, as suggested by Varga, is nostalgia for the 1960s as a time of personal liberation and in the Eastern European context, a period when citizens were allowed to retreat into a private sphere and live less regimented lives than was the case during Stalinism. Another is the skill with which the authors prepared the musical and dance numbers, which is always a crucial factor in the success of musicals.ⁱ

The Lure or the inclusive space of disco

The Lure was Agnieszka Smoczyńska's (b. 1978) full-length fiction debut. As such, in common with Hřebejk's film, it is a production geared primarily to domestic audience, as well as international festival circuit, particularly smaller festivals, specialising in

independent, niche films. *The Lure* was shown, among others, at Sundance Festival and GoEast Festival in Wiesbaden.

Prior to *The Lure* Smoczyńska directed several shorter, documentary and fiction films, as well as episodes of popular television series. In her early productions music played an important role and she focused on women who were either independent or strove to become liberated from the shackles of domesticity and patriarchy through friendship with fellow women. *The Lure* follows this pattern, being inspired by the life and music of the Wrońskie sisters (Barbara and Zuzanna), who in 2007 set up an electronic pop band Ballady i Romanse (Ballads and Romances).ⁱⁱ The film apparently derived from Wrońskie and Smoczyńska's fascination with the Polish culture of *dancingi*, flourishing in Poland in the 1970s and the 1980s. At these events people ate and danced to the accompaniment of live music, mostly of disco and estrada type.

The Lure is a hybrid of horror and musical, inspired by the fairy-tale *The Little Mermaid* by Hans Christian Andersen and set in Warsaw in the mid-1980s. As in *Big Beat* and *Made in Hungaria*, at the centre of the story are mysterious outsiders or returnees. On these occasions the strangers are two blood-thirsty mermaids, Silver and Golden. They reach Warsaw by swimming up the Vistula river and find themselves in the Adria *dancing*, which in the 1980s was regarded as the most exclusive dance club in Warsaw. Thanks to their youth and beauty, they find employment in the band Figi and Daktyl (Figs and Dates) and move in with the female leader of the band, Krycia. Subsequently Silver falls in love with Figs and Dates' bass player and sacrifices her tail for the female form, but is betrayed by her lover and as in Andersen's tale, ends as foam disappearing in the water. However, her death is revenged by her sister, who murders Silver's lover.

In between these tragic and horrific events, numerous songs are played. Most of them are performed in Adria, which is presented as an enclave, sheltered from the normal flow of life, where people can indulge in illicit pleasures, such as watching striptease and eating luxurious food. In this sense Adria comes across as an almost western institution, but also reflects the final years of the state socialist regime in Poland, where the government lost its grip on society and allowed 'capitalist' and 'decadent' institutions to flourish, as long as they operated discreetly and added to the empty coffers of state finances. Adria is dominated by disco music, both foreign and Polish.

Visually, it is difficult to pinpoint *The Lure* to a specific period. Apart from the brief image of a queue, we are spared the typical iconography of post-martial law Poland, with obligatory tanks on the streets, neverending winter, shortages of food and greyness. Moreover, all scenes are drowned in heavy light, giving the impression that the characters move in a colourful fog. Furthermore, there is no consistency to lighting. This reflects the hybrid, musical-horror character of the film, but also creates an impression that the film is made of separate clips, hastily joined to make up a film.

Unlike in *Big Beat* and *Made in Hungaria*, where western music overshadowed music produced in the Eastern bloc, in *The Lure* it does not thwart or clash with eastern products, but seamlessly merges with them. This can be explained by the fact that the West is represented here by disco, rather than rock. Unlike rock, original contributors to disco came from a larger pool of countries, including continental Europe, as demonstrated by such phenomena as italo disco, and even the greatest American disco hits often had European roots, in tracks produced by German band Kraftwerk and the Italian composer Giorgio Moroder whose ‘production work with Pete Belotte for Donna Summer brought a Munich sound of analogue synthesisers in disco to international attention’ (Collins, Schedel and Wilson 2013: 104). A case in point is ‘I Feel Love’ from 1977, ‘which holds an otherworldly allure when compared to more conventional instrument-based disco tracks of its time’ (ibid.). Provincial origins might be one reason why, during its heyday, disco music had a bad press, as much in the West, as in the East. In the West it was accused of being trivial, inauthentic and irredeemably capitalistic. Likewise, in the East it was seen as trivial, inauthentic and the music which, astonishingly, the communist authorities were fond of.ⁱⁱⁱ

One of the first interventions in defence of disco was an essay of this very title published by queer scholar Richard Dyer in 1979. In it, Dyer argues that disco is no less capitalist than rock (Dyer 1992b: 150-52), while having certain advantages over rock. In particular, ‘rock’s eroticism is thrusting, grinding – it is not whole body, but phallic’ (ibid.: 153); disco, by contrast, ‘indicates an openness to a sexuality that is not defined in terms of cock’ (ibid.: 154). By the same token, disco music and culture is more friendly towards gay men and women, both straight and lesbians. The inclusion of disco hits in *The Lure* can be seen as a sign of Smoczyńska’s recognition of both their musical and social value beyond the hetero-normative culture, namely their suitability to express female and gay desire.

‘I Feel Love’, the ultimate disco song, also found its way to *The Lure*. It is covered by Krysia, who makes it her own, to a much larger extent than Hungarian rockers ‘Hungarianised’ American rock and roll hits, as we saw in the previous film. In her interpretation ‘I Feel Love’ comes across as a premonition of the amorous and otherworldly relations which are forged between the mermaids and those whom they encounter on their way. It can be regarded as a song about a quasi-maternal and quasi-lesbian relationship which Krysia has with Silver and Golden, and the foretelling of Silver’s infatuation with the bass player. Like Donna Summer in her 1970s performance, Krysia’s costume is shiny and she wears heavy make-up, pointing to the artificiality and autonomy of the disco culture. However, her movements are snake-like, as if she was about to ensnare and devour a victim, trying to become a mermaid herself.

The second type of songs used in the films are covers of some Polish hits from the 1980s, such as ‘Bananowy song’ (Banana Song), originally sung by Vox, ‘Byłaś sercem biciem’ (You Were the Beat of My Heart), sung by Andrzej Zaucha and ‘Daj mi tę noc’ (Give Me This Night), from the repertoire of the band Bolter. Although very popular in this period, these songs were derided by cultural elites on the grounds of being inauthentic and pandering to the lowest taste. This criticism was especially directed to Bolter’s hit, not least because the band’s creator, Sławomir Sokołowski, became a producer of disco polo songs, a type of disco influenced by Polish folklore, which in the 1990s became a byword for bad taste. *The Lure* resurrects, updates and dignifies these old hits by providing them with new musical arrangement, pertaining to the 2010s, when disco or rather its successor, EDM, was no longer the epitome of bad taste. The authors of the film changed their gender character, particularly ‘You Were a Beat of My Heart’, which was a male romantic song (verging on ‘cock sexuality’, to use Dyer’s terms) and became a song performed by three women: Krysia and her ‘daughters’: Golden and Silver, connected by familial and erotic love. Finally, the film uses the original productions of the band Ballady i Romanse. They come across as the least catchy of the songs played in the film; and their function is to fill some gaps in the narrative. One can conjecture that if Smoczyńska relied in her film on original repertoire, the overall result would be less satisfactory. The fact that the 1980s pop songs sound so good in the film points to their lasting charm and malleability.

Unlike the two films discussed previously, *The Lure* does not fit easily the paradigm of self-colonisation with western music. It better suits the idea of aesthetic cosmopolitanisation, as explained by Motti Regev:

a process of intensified aesthetic proximity, overlap, and connectivity between nations and ethnicities or, at the very least, between prominent large sectors within them. It is a process in which the expressive forms of cultural practices used by nations at large, and by groupings within them, to signify and perform their sense of uniqueness, growingly comes to share large proportions of aesthetic common ground, to a point where the cultural uniqueness of each nation or ethnicity cannot but be understood as a unit within one complex entity, one variant in a set of quite similar – although never identical cases. *Aesthetic cosmopolitanization* is a term that is best suited to depict this process in world culture [and it] refers to the ongoing formation, in late modernity, of world culture as one complexly interconnected entity, in which social groupings of all types around the globe growingly share wide common grounds in their aesthetic perceptions, expressive forms, and cultural practices. *Aesthetic cosmopolitanism* refers, then, to the already existing singular world culture. (Regev 2013: 3)

One can argue that aesthetic cosmopolitanisation and its effect, aesthetic cosmopolitanism, is more democratic, because it does not assume a hierarchy of cultures and musics; it perceives culture in terms of a cauldron, in which different cultures mix, to produce new cultures. Aesthetic cosmopolitanism regards world culture as one complexly interconnected entity, in which social groupings of all types around the globe share common grounds in their aesthetic perceptions, expressive forms, and cultural practices.

As with the Hřebejk film, the English title of Smoczyńska's movie is far from the literal translation of the Polish title, which is 'Daughters of Dancing'. The Polish title reflects the fact that in the space of *dancing* musics and cultures are passed from one generation to the next, rather than from the West to the East, which humbly accepts its inferior position.

The Lure had relatively positive reviews in Poland thanks to its boldness in moving away from mainstream Polish film production. It was also a true festival film, as I mentioned above. However, it did poorly in the box office in Poland, making only about \$100,000 overall. Reviewers discussing *The Lure* on YouTube admitted that the novelty wears off after

twenty minutes or so and one is left with a collections of episodes which do not add up. Thus, it fails to create a coherent narrative with bearable characters.

Cold War: How to conquer the West with eastern popular music

Of all directors whose films I discuss in this article, the director of *Cold War*, Paweł Pawlikowski, was most famous. He won an Oscar for his previous film *Ida* (2013) and numerous awards for his other films. In terms of its production, *Cold War* is a very international enterprise, being co-produced by companies from Poland, Britain and France. The film had its premiere at the Cannes Film Festival, reflecting Pawlikowski's elevated status as one of the most celebrated Eastern European directors in the West, as well as pan-European directors, following in the footsteps of Krzysztof Kieslowski, Michael Haneke and **Bela Tarr**.

Cold War tells the story of two musicians and lovers, Zula and Wiktor, spanning about twenty years, from the end of the Second World War till the end of the 1960s. Wiktor begins his screen life as an ethnomusicologist, who with his partner Irena travels the Polish countryside to make records of local songs. The viewer first assumes that their recording is for the sake of preserving the fragile folk culture, but in due course we learn that the couple have a more pragmatic reason to collect these gems of folk art – to create a 'new Polish folklore', which will be appreciated by people living in the cities, as well as beyond Polish borders. Wiktor and Irena's goal is thus changing folklore into what in Poland was described as folklorism: an 'arbitrary, artificial, spectacular representation of the folk culture fabricated for the mass audience' (Burszta 1974: 299). One can also see a parallel between folklorism and world music: both types of music draw on folklore, but repackage them for the 'world' (Bohlman 2002: 27). The final outcome of their work is to set up an ensemble Mazurek (modelled on the real folklorist band Mazowsze), made of excellent dancers and singers, irrespective of whether they come from the countryside or not.

It is during an audition for Mazurek that Wiktor meets Zula and subsequently they become lovers. Mazurek is very successful and Zula becomes its star, while Wiktor its conductor and artistic director. However, Wiktor is unhappy in his role, feeling that it limits his artistic freedom. What bothers him most is the political character of Mazurek's activities, which includes performing openly propagandist songs praising political leaders. However, it might be that his dissatisfaction also has to do with the narrow genre parameters in which

Mazurek operates: its requirement to sound ‘folklorist’. He, for his part, would like to sound modern. For this reason during Mazurek’s trip to East Berlin, Wiktor escapes to the West. He hopes that Zula would go with him, but she decides to stay with Mazurek, aware that abroad she would not have a chance to make a career comparable to what she enjoys in Poland. However, love proves stronger than the desire for a professional success and Zula eventually joins Wiktor, who by this point lives in Paris.

While *Big Beat* and *Made in Hungaria* pronounce the superiority of western music over that produced in the East; *The Lure* puts western and Polish hits on the same level; *Cold War* asks what conditions Polish (and by extension) Eastern European songs and their performers have to fulfil to achieve success in the West. Such a question Pawlikowski himself faced, when making films in the UK and France. He points to two possibilities, which I describe as ‘mimicry’ and ‘orientalisation’. The first strategy applies to Wiktor. This is reflected in his dispassionate, almost mechanical playing with a club jazz band and writing the score to a film he watches on screen. These episodes show him being subordinated to somebody’s else’s art rather than following his own ideas and sensitivity, as in the cases of the Czech and Hungarian films, except that characters in those films seemed to be content to imitate western music, while Wiktor is frustrated with this position. This might reflect the fact that he does not self-colonise himself out of his own volition, but of necessity, to earn his living. By contrast, we never see him in Paris playing ‘his own’ music, even to himself, which seemed to be the main reason why he decided to leave Mazurek and Poland. Although Wiktor’s social status and economic standing is higher than that of most Eastern European émigrés to the West, who were typically condemned to manual work, ultimately he suffers from a sense of displacement, a lack of fulfilment and even emasculation. This is noticed by Zula, who reproaches Wiktor saying, ‘In Poland you were a man, and here you are somebody else.’

While Wiktor in Paris tries to be like everybody else, he wants Zula to impress her hosts with her otherness. As Agnieszka Morstin puts it, Wiktor created for Zula an image of an ‘untamed Slavic beauty, who killed her father, danced for Stalin and eventually married an Italian prince. All of this is made according to the superficial expectations of the Parisian salon, belonging to which Wiktor aspires without realising that this very ambition reveals his inferiority complex’ (Morstin 2018: 81). Zula initially gives in to Wiktor’s ambitions and attempts to make a singing career in the West. However, with her vitality and openness, she

feels out of place among Parisian *culturati* who favour more reserved behaviour. Moreover, she realises that she is unable either to translate her Polish experience into French songs nor identify with French culture so that she can express it the way French singers do, such as Edith Piaf, with whom she shares her untamed nature. Although Zula manages to make a record in France, she feels that this record has no value and smashes it on the way from the studio to the apartment she shares with Wiktor. Even if she had a more positive attitude to her work and tried to promote it, most likely it would be just one of many records made by aspiring artists, which would fail to ensure her star status, comparable to what she enjoyed in her homeland. Eventually Zula returns to Poland and makes a career as a star of estrada, which reflects the trajectory of some real stars of Polish folklorist ensembles, such as Irena Santor, who made the transition from folklorist songs performed with Mazowsze to more contemporary ‘popular music’.

The problem of authenticity of performance is conveyed in *Cold War* through the use of music. As Leslie Felperin observes, ‘*Cold War* is a musicologist's delight’ (Felperin 2018) thanks to including fragments from George Gershwin and other jazzy pieces, Bill Haley & His Comets’ ‘Rock Around the Clock’, as well as a song inspired by South American music, which Zula sings, after she ended her career in Mazurek, to the applause of an enthusiastic audience. All the examples of popular music used in the film can be described as inauthentic, due to being either folklorist, propagandist or foreign, hence manufactured or transplanted to the Polish context. However, Pawlikowski shows that songs can be authenticated through connections with personal or group histories. This is demonstrated by different versions of the songs ‘Dwa serduszka, cztery oczy’ (Two Hearts, Four Eyes). First a young peasant girl sings this song to be recorded by Irena and Wiktor. Next we see it introduced to the repertoire of Mazurek, where it makes Zula the star of the ensemble. Finally, she performs a jazzy version of the song in a club in Paris. Given that the first version is performed in circumstances most similar to the original rendition, we can conjecture that this account is most authentic. However, as this version is not related to anybody’s story in the film, including the girl who performs it, it probably hardly affects the viewers and most of them forgot it by the time they hear it performed by Zula. Only when Zula adopts it, does it come across as authentic, because it is connected to the story of her love for Wiktor. Her singing it in Paris again comes across as authentic, because in France she continues to suffer from unrequited love, even though she does not identify herself with her new ‘jazzy’ persona. In reality ‘Two Hearts, Four Eyes’ is not a folk song, but one written in a folklorist style by

Mazowsze's managers, Mira Zimińska and Tadeusz Sygietyński, and its hit potential was recognised by filmmakers and performers before Pawlikowski used it in *Cold War*. It was presented in the film *Żona dla Australijczyka* (*Wife for an Australian*, 1964), directed by Stanisław Bareja in Mazowsze's version and recorded in a jazzy style by Anna Maria Jopek, one of the most popular Polish singers of the last twenty years, who in her repertoire draws both on jazz and folk music, and whose father performed in a Mazowsze ensemble himself. Ultimately, Pawlikowski does not offer an answer to how to make a career in music in the West, given that neither of his protagonists stays there long enough to test their strategy for success. However, through the choice of music he downplays the role of 'authenticity' as a factor in success, and underscores the role of professionalism, possibly drawing on his own experience.

Of the four films discussed here, *Cold War* is the only film whose title did not disappear in translation, and it well reflects the topic of the film: cold war as an obstacle to western and eastern cultures and musics achieving a similar status and entering a dialogue as equal partners. Of course, this was not the only reason why the latter was seen as inferior; as this had equally to do with practically all Europe seen as inferior in relation to Anglo-American music. However, focusing on non-rock genres allows Pawlikowski to occlude this problem and play up the cold war as the barrier for Polish music competing with western music on an equal footing.

Cold War was a critical and commercial success on the domestic and international market, including receiving an Oscar nomination. If anything, this success suggests that if Eastern European artists want to make a mark on the West, it makes little sense to do so by regurgitating western art; they have to work on making their own art and culture palatable for a foreign audience.

Conclusions

The four films discussed here grapple with the question of the relationship between Eastern Europe and the West in a large part through representation of popular songs. The first two of them judge western music superior to Eastern European music and suggest that the best path for musicians coming from this region to achieve success is through imitation and translation of western songs. At the same time, however, *Big Beat* questions the possibility of successful self-colonisation. In *The Lure* western and Polish popular songs are put on an equal footing

thanks to focusing on disco which is a more (continental) European genre than rock. Finally, *Cold War* privileges Polish songs, asking the question whether they can conquer the West and on what terms. The differences in positioning of these songs can be explained by different experiences and statuses of their respective directors, reflected by their sources of funding and budgets, with the director of *Cold War*, Paweł Pawlikowski, having the most extensive experience of working in the West and the highest status there. Paradoxically, this leads him to scepticism about the chances of the Easterners to conquer the West and even a need to do it.

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ⁱ Their value lies not only in supporting the narrative, but also working as music clips which can be watched repeatedly on YouTube. *Made in Hungaria* tapped into such watching habits and reaped the reward.

ⁱⁱ The name is a reference to the first volume of poems by the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz, whose publication in 1822 is regarded as a symbolic beginning of Polish Romanticism.

ⁱⁱⁱ In the Polish documentary *Beats of Freedom* (2010), directed by Wojciech Gnoiński and Leszek Słota we find an opinion that people like Edward Gierek (the Party leader in the 1970s) did not like rock; their favourite music was that of Boney M.